DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 785 CS 012 084

AUTHOR Mueller, Faye; And Others
TITLE Portraits of Exemplary Literacy Practices: The Arizona Initiative for Children.
INSTITUTION Far West Lab. for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Arizona Education Foundation.
PUB DATE Jan 95
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Environment; *Integrated Curriculum; *Language Arts; *Literacy; Primary Education; Program Descriptions; Public Schools; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS *Arizona; Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children; Emergent Literacy; *School Culture

ABSTRACT

This booklet presents portraits of 10 Literacy Sites selected by the Arizona Department of Education, sites where the entire school was involved in the Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children. An introductory section of the booklet discusses the Initiative, which was established to promote early experiences in reading and writing that would motivate students and build better literacy skills in the kindergarten through third grade public school population through an integration of the language arts. Sections of the booklet are: (1) Weaving Writing, Speaking, Reading, Listening into Literacy; (2) Using Literacy for Purposeful Learning; (3) Making Literacy Meaningful; (4) Supporting Literacy through School Culture. An appendix lists the 10 sites. (RS)

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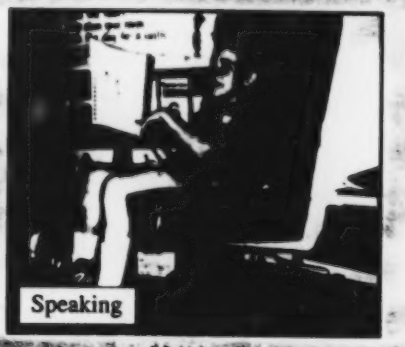
Portraits of Exemplary Literacy Practices



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Acknowledgements ☼

The authors wish to thank Irene Munger-Grubbs, Librarian Media Specialist, and Marilynn D. Henley, Deputy Associate Superintendent, at the Arizona Department of Education. They have been very supportive of this project and reviewed the draft of this report. Our thanks go to all the people at the literacy sites who took time out of their busy schedules to share their good work with us.

This project was funded by the Arizona Education Foundation. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Foundation.

Design: Faye Mueller; Original Art: Patrick Flick; Photograpy: Faye Mueller - Cover, pages, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21; Courtesy Borton Primary Magnet School - Cover, pages 12, 20; Courtesy Abia Judd Elementary School - page13; Courtesy Silvestre S. Herrera Elementary School - page 24

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Portraits of Exemplary Literacy Practices:

The Arizona Initiative for Children

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January 1995[1]

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INTRODUCTION ☼

The Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children

National statistics in the mid 1980's indicated that at least half of the students in the United States were unable to write acceptable compositions. Several Arizona surveys of students and teachers revealed that less than half the available instructional time in Language Arts was given to writing. In addition, many students reported that they rarely made notes before writing or talked to a teacher or their peers about their writing (*Language Arts Essential Skills*, 1989). Further, in a national reading assessment, barely sixty percent of fourth graders could read at a basic level: read a simple narrative, identify details and relate them to personal experiences (*NAEP 1992 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States*, 1993). Students at all grade levels reported spending little time reading either for school purposes or their own pleasure (*Learning to Read in Our Nation's Schools*, 1990).

The *Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children* was established in 1988 to promote early experiences in reading and writing that would motivate students and build better literacy skills at an early age. The following year the Arizona Department of Education published a revised framework, *Language Arts Essential Skills*. The document reinforced the *Literacy Initiative* and provided guidelines for improving young students' skills in four literacy areas: writing, speaking, reading, and listening.

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) began a selection process in February of 1988 to identify exemplary "sites" where essential student skills, productive teaching strategies, and school factors would contribute to early literacy. Schools or classrooms could nominate themselves by submitting an application and providing information about the principles of their literacy effort. A video of literacy activities was to accompany the application. Applicants were required to demonstrate that they were sites whose environments and practices promoted student achievement in writing, speaking, reading, and listening. The Department of Education reviewed all applications for selection. Twelve sites were originally selected. Today there are 68 designated Literacy Sites. Names and addresses are published in an information directory, *Directory of Arizona Literacy Sites*, and distributed to all schools in the state, so that other educators may learn about them.

Key Elements of the Initiative are to:

- promote statewide, system-wide changes and improvements in the instruction of reading and writing in kindergarten through third grade for all public school students,
- help young students to enthusiastically develop their own reading and writing skills,
- serve as a bridge for students to move beyond basic levels of literacy to advanced levels of enjoyment and achievement, and
- provide criteria for accurate, measurable, performance-based assessments in reading and writing.

From 1991-1993, Citibank has provided funds in support for the *Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children*. Citibank and the ADE developed a promotional campaign to expand public awareness of and support for the Initiative. They produced and distributed a video, "Plant the Seed, Learn to Read," describing the Initiative. They also compiled a *Directory* containing information about the teachers and schools involved in successful literacy practices. ComputerPals Writing Network was developed to link urban and rural schools together in reading and writing activities. Funds were set aside for an independent evaluation of the Initiative. In the fall of 1993, Citibank was purchased by NorWest Bank who continued to sponsor this program.

The Study

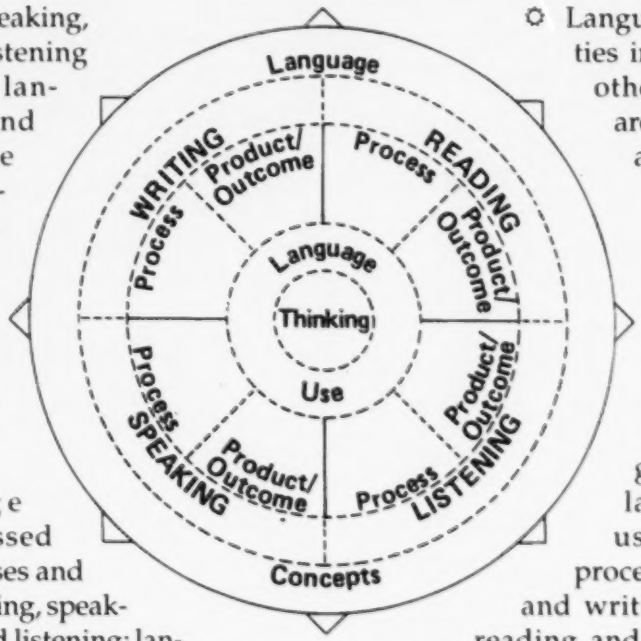
In 1994 Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL) in San Francisco, California was invited to conduct an independent assessment of the program and to provide information for the ADE to interpret and improve the programs and impact of the *Literacy Initiative for Children*. The FWL assessment has entailed site visits to identify and highlight exemplary literacy sites.

FWL staff conducted site visits at ten Literacy Sites which were selected by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). All sites selected were places where the entire school was involved in the *Initiative*. They include a variety of urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the state (see the Appendix for the names of the schools and their locations). FWL staff observed students and teachers in classrooms, interviewed teachers and principals, collected student examples and other materials relevant to the site's literacy initiative. Staff composed vignettes to capture the many literacy practices observed at the ten sites. The vignettes illustrate how Arizona educators at literacy sites are teaching for literacy.

The Concept of Literacy

Arizona's *Language Arts Essential Skills* framework called for the integration of the Language Arts: writing, speaking, reading, and listening. It emphasized the following principles (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Language Arts Essential Skills Schematic



- Writing, speaking, reading and listening are forms of language use and thinking; the schematic, Figure 1, moves outward from thinking to language uses of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- Language use is expressed through processes and products in writing, speaking, reading, and listening; language concepts are developed through the same processes.
- Language arts abilities influence every other curriculum area; arrows radiating from the outer circle suggest this relationship.
- The knowledge gained through language arts use integrates processes, products and writing, speaking, reading and listening; the dotted concentric lines indicates the integration.

The Framework directs districts and schools to accomodate "the diversity of learners in the state" and to build a language arts curriculum specific to the experience, culture, or language background of their student population. The Literacy Initiative attempts to bring meaningful use of spoken and written language to that diversity of background and interests.

PART I: WEAVING WRITING, SPEAKING, READING, LISTENING INTO LITERACY ☼

If we wish to achieve the goal of full literacy for all students in our society . . . the emphasis in school has to be placed on the use of texts to empower action, thinking, and feeling in the context of purposeful social activity. What this requires is the creation of classroom communities of literate thinkers, in which students collaborate with each other in activities, chosen with teacher guidance, that involve the use of texts of all kinds — both as a resource for achieving understanding and as a means for communicating what has been understood to others, both inside and outside the classroom. Where the essentially social nature of literacy is emphasized, along with its power to facilitate thinking, talk about the texts that students are engaging with will occur quite spontaneously. . . . How to create such classroom communities of literate thinkers is thus the challenge that faces us.

Gordon Wells, *Educational Leadership*, 1990

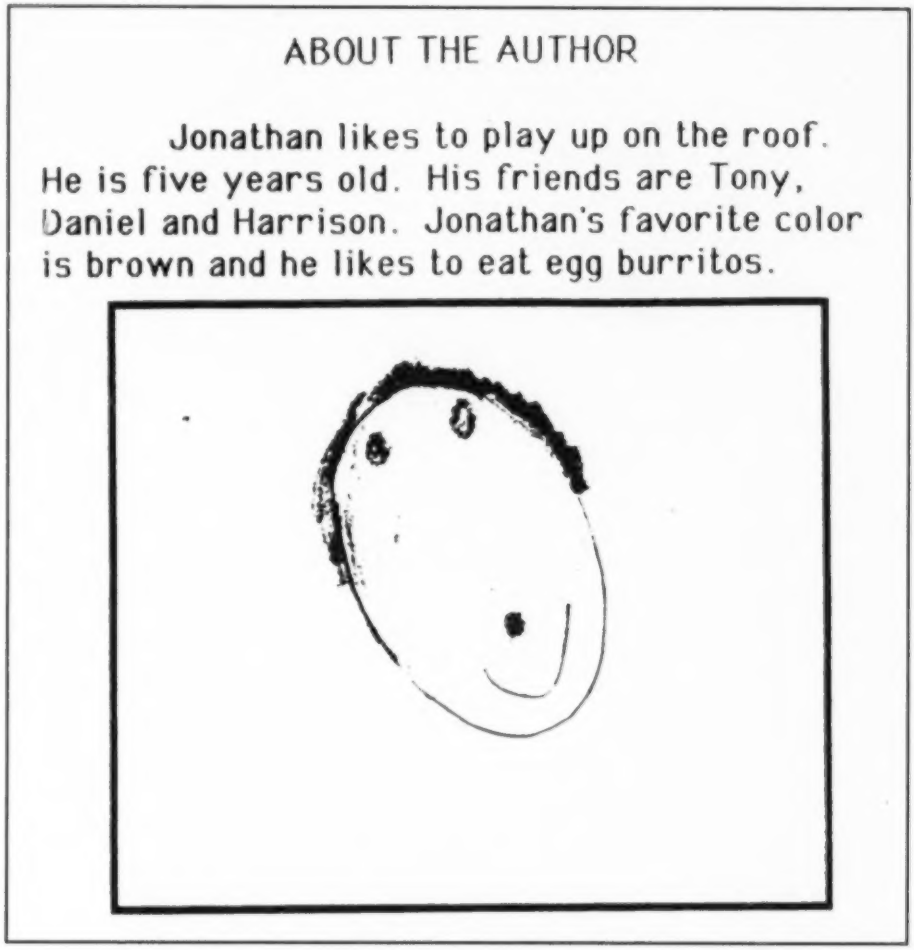
It is clear that at literacy sites there is an emphasis on the connection between spoken and written language. Teachers skillfully weave the two language domains together to teach and facilitate their students' literacy learning. Whether through using books, writing stories, listening to poetry, performing skits, or working with a computer, teachers weave together writing, speaking, reading, and listening into purposeful activities. Children listen to books read to them, and they read books out loud. They write stories and present their works to each other. They critique what they read, write, or present; and they learn.

Larry Bauer, principal at Esperanza Elementary School, echoes comments heard from many Arizona educators, "The goal of promoting the use of reading and writing at an early age is so that students will use them as a tool for learning. . . . That will give them confidence as they move throughout the grade levels."

The children at these model sites also seem to enjoy their early discovery of the power of language. Writing, speaking, reading and listening connect easily and naturally to the experience and understanding children bring to school. Children's "native" knowledge is built upon, extended and enriched. Teachers encourage their students by providing a wide variety of contexts and audiences for their work. They use their creations as tools for tangible purposes, for communications with others as well as for engaging projects of special interest to them. Purpose and excitement abound. The following section describes literacy activities in the classroom.

Individual Books

Kindergarten students at Westwood Primary School in Phoenix write a lot. They are authors whose books are also read. Readers recommend books to each other: "This one is about magic." "Here's the one about the truck I told you about." "You're going to like the end of this one." "This one's about a cowboy eating ice cream!" Children proudly show their books to adult visitors. A favorite section of each book is *About the Author*.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Jonathan likes to play up on the roof. He is five years old. His friends are Tony, Daniel and Harrison. Jonathan's favorite color is brown and he likes to eat egg burritos.

The author's page, The Zoo, *Jonathan Salinas, 1994*

Students select their best works for publication. They pick from among their many works which have been crafted to describe experiences, to express ideas, to relay and explain information, or to elicit laughter. Teachers publish the submitted work, using a desktop publishing program and a classroom computer. Student writing takes on a more polished look. Below is an example of the transformation process.

From draft to publication, The Zoo, *Jonathan Salinas, 1994*

The published book is then photocopied. The original can be taken home, while the copy is added to an already rich class library. Children are proud of their published books.

Book publication is a celebration and fun for everyone. The author reads his or her book aloud sitting in the "Author's Chair." The audience is attentive and enjoys listening. They freely laugh at the humor. They ask questions about the information presented. They appreciate and comment on their fellow author's efforts, the drawings, and the expressive ways the story is written or read. These young children are communicators.

A student reads his book to his classmates from the Author's Chair

Big Books

Reading as a meaning-getting, predictable, and interactive process is often taught through the use of a "big book." A big book has large print, large enough for all to see. Students, generally the entire class, gather in front of a big book to read with their teacher. The teacher points to the words while reading aloud. This activity becomes a shared book experience in which a teacher models reading behaviors and leads children towards attention to words and sentences. Extending the concept of the "weave of literacy," the connections between written and spoken words, students are also encouraged to write together.

On a visit to Carminati School in Tempe, one easily finds a teacher reading a big book with the class. The students cluster around the book and join in enthusiastic choral reading. Another day they compose together a big book which follows the same pattern. This new big book, illustrated by the class and bound in the publishing center, also finds its way to the class library for continual reading and enjoyment. Children are **readers and writers** in these classrooms.

A Big Book Reading Page

This is the cherry
as sweet as candy,
that goes on the sprinkles
as colorful as a rainbow,
that go on the whipped cream
as white as snow,
that goes on the nuts crunchy
and crisp,
that go on the banana
as yellow as a dandelion,
that goes on
the mint chocolate chip ice cream
as green as a chalkboard,
that goes in the bowl
as clean as can be,
that started the sundae first grade made.

by Grade One,
Carminati School

A student leads her classmates in reading a "big book"

Poetry

The *Arizona Literacy Initiative for Children* has encouraged the expression of ideas through poetry writing.

At Bicentennial School in Glendale, Arizona the hallways and classroom walls are adorned with student poetry, compositions and art; attesting that children here do a lot of writing, speaking, reading, and listening. In Mrs. Lashley's combination first and second grade class some students in cross-age work groups write poetry about how they "see" wind. At a natural pause in that activity, Mrs. Lashley gathers the children in a circle around the author's chair. They take turns, climbing up into that big chair, to read their works to their classmates. Vicky reads, "... Every night my Mom comes to kiss me good night. I hold it to remember. ..."

Skits and Plays

As "writer-actors" discuss and plan for a performance and as "listener-critiquers" gather to be the audience, a teacher guides students in how to provide feedback to each other. The weaving of the spoken and written language domains to facilitate her students' literacy is skillfully accomplished.

Students in a multi-grade class of first, second, and third graders at Isaac Imes Magnet School in Glendale are writing plays based on popular fairy tales. They are grouped, across ages, into six clusters of three to four children. One cluster is working on *Little Red Riding Hood*, another on *Gingerbread Boy*, yet another on *Hansel and Gretel*. During the process the children decide among themselves the parts they want to play; they write their scripts; and act them out. The more able/older students often help the younger children in writing and practicing their lines. Taking turns, each cluster of children performs its play in front of the class. As they prepare to perform, the teacher instructs the audience on how to provide constructive criticism. Mrs. Thomas explains that they are to judge for themselves what worked and what did not. To the audience she says, "Give some constructive criticism. Don't say you didn't like it. Say what it is that you liked. Explain what was not clear, then tell what would have made it more clear for you." To the players she reminds them that they should listen to the critiques but that they need not accept all the suggestions. As children rehearse their performances, they are also **learning how to address an audience** and **how to assess a performance**.

Computers

Computer technology offers a broad potential for literacy activities. Students plan, write, and publish with their computers.

At Esperanza, in addition to classroom computers, there is a school computer lab equipped with thirty computers. Teachers integrate writing and reading instruction with computers. All classes are scheduled into the lab. Kindergarten students use *Storybook Weaver*, a computer program with word processing and picture capacity, to create stories. They select scenes and insert different characters into the scene, then give it a title and write some words to go with it. Just before Mother's Day kindergartners made cards for their mothers on the computers. The children loved doing it and proudly took their cards home with them.

Assessment

This rich array of products from performances and learning activities provides an on-going record of student accomplishments which can be used by teachers and parents. Many of the literacy sites are collecting this information in portfolios.

Daily journals are a valuable chronicle of a child's growth in reading and writing. For example, first graders at Taylor Hicks Elementary School in Prescott, begin the school year by making daily entries in a journal of their own design. At first, a child might run words together. Later on, spaces creep in between the words, evidence to the teacher that the young writer has developed a sense of "word" and the ways they are represented in writing.

A student composes her Mother's Day card on a computer

Teachers are collecting the work of their students that represents what has been accomplished. Young students select their best work, date it and put it in a folder. In some cases, a teacher may decide what particular projects would be included in the students' portfolio folder. The portfolios reveal student achievements and progress through actual work done over the school year. Teachers use these portfolios to help parents and next year's teacher gauge a student's level of reading and writing.

PART II: USING LITERACY FOR PURPOSEFUL LEARNING ☼

. . . people learn best when learning starts with what they already know, builds on their strengths, engages them in the learning process, and enables them to accomplish something they want to accomplish.

Elsa Auerbach, *Making Meaning, Making Change*, 1992

Instruction for better literacy combines writing, speaking, reading and listening into related activities that stimulate students to reason and to communicate about important information.

David Bloome, *Literacy and Schooling*, 1987

Teachers at literacy sites skillfully weave the written and spoken domains of language into many subjects and across a variety of settings. Learning becomes a process of dialogue, problem solving, of positing possible outcomes, and reflection. Teachers use the everyday needs and interests of their students to provide them with collaborative, student-centered learning activities. Writing, speaking, reading, and listening become modes for gaining and presenting information and for enjoyment. The following section describes curricular approaches teachers use to provide opportunities for their students to develop and practice literacy skills.

Thematic Instruction

In thematic units, students and their teacher select topics and themes to explore. These can unify a spectrum of concepts from academic disciplines including math, science, art, social studies, or language arts. While pursuing a theme, opportunities for students to practice and develop their literacy skills emerge. For example, at Abia Judd Elementary School aspects of literature, art and social studies were integrated into a culminating activity when students prepared for Pioneer Day. They role-played the lives of pioneers after doing research on early Arizona natives and settlers. In a hands-on project they also recreated pioneer-era artifacts and wrote about the living conditions of pioneers and Native people from the past.

Past and present were connected at Isaac Imes when students in a multi-age class studied knights and castles. Their teacher, Cheryl Thomas, used the theme of medieval ethics and linked it across time to her students' everyday life. In the process of gathering the information required to make replicas of castles, writing stories and reports, and performing plays about kings and knights, they also began to explore the concept of loyalty,

valor, and honor. Their discussions led them to write about the meaning of being loyal to a friend or someone respected.

Delving further into the topic, they pursued the meaning of having a bond with someone and its connection with knighthood. They discussed the loyalty knights needed to serve their king. Writing and discussing, reading and listening to each other, their ideas about medieval and modern loyalty became tangible and clear. They grew to understand medieval ethics relative to their own. Through their discussions and writings they also began to understand themselves better.

Preparing for the medieval pageant, students dress as knights and ladies

"Where Were You Born?" a class project at Borton Primary School in Tuscon, enabled children to learn about each other and to integrate their knowledge and skills in world geography, computation, graphing art, oral and written communication. Children surveyed the entire school population; drew a wall-sized map of the world and indicated everyone's birthplace. They arranged the information by state and country. They tabulated and displayed the data in colorful graphs and pie charts along the length of a hallway wall. To explain their findings (and to celebrate their accomplishments) they made a presentation to the whole school.

Maps showing places where students were born

Students in a third grade classroom at Esperanza Elementary School were organized into "companies" of four students, each with its own computer. Each company became a "Paper Airplane" factory. At the start of their project, they were given a budget of $2000. Subsidiary companies supplied materials and parts (paper, paper clips, pencils).

Contracts were written. Each company flight-tested its aircraft. Charts were created to enter, hold, and display data in meaningful ways. Modifications were conceived and carried through after test flights, to see if their product could be improved. Pay and bonuses were calculated, won, or lost at various stages of the process. External "consultants" - business people, came to visit and show the students actual (real world) company year end reports. The students' projects ended with a report of their own to their "Board of Trustees," describing the outcome of their enterprise.

Problem-Based Learning

Teachers encourage students to develop an understanding of a topic through their involvement with an actual problem. Instruction and learning are directly linked to situations close to children's lives and, sometimes, to the reality of the school. Students practice and expand their literacy skills while using them to solve a problem they face.

At Abia Judd the need to prevent soil erosion on a nearby hill turned a school problem into a learning experience which integrated the disciplines of science, mathematics, social studies, history and language arts. Erosion in a desert ecology is a continuing problem. The hill adjoining Abia Judd was slowly being eaten away by the elements and students playing on it. When students were reprimanded, they came up with an idea to "save the hill" and curtail the damage. Second grade students visited a local nature center and learned about native Arizona ecologies and conservation techniques that could be applied to the erosion project. They wrote reports so that other classes could gain from the information they had gathered. After studying ways to prevent further damage to the hill and writing letters for donations for materials, students found a local developer to donate native plants. They seeded the hill and built steps. They conducted scientific experiments to measure the erosion, clocked the elements, and monitored the weather. In the process, they sharpened their research skills, read books and articles related to their problem, and wrote about the environment's meaning in their lives. A walk outside the school today provides tangible evidence of the students' work-in-progress.

A class learns about techniques to save the hill adjacent to their school

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PART III: MAKING LITERACY MEANINGFUL ☼

Literacy that helps children to articulate their todays and to make ongoing connections with others may be more likely to grow with them into their tomorrows.

Anne Haas Dyson, *Multiple Worlds of Child Writers*, 1989

Students learn to be literate by constantly communicating with a variety of audiences. This process is enhanced by expanding the range of audiences. An audience to communicate with provides literacy with function and purpose. Writing and reading, speaking and listening naturally complement each other in ongoing communication. This constant to and fro relationship between writing and reading, speaking and listening was observable at the literacy sites.

Providing Purpose: Audience

The most immediate and accessible audiences are in the classroom. Students read their writing aloud from the "Author's Chair." They recite their poetry and perform skits for their friends and classmates. They gather data and provide information to each other.

Teachers expand their students' audiences by skillfully structuring situations to connect them with people outside the classroom. For example, Borton Primary Magnet has a mail service, operated by the second/third grade Bilingual class. Students can write to anyone in the school. The mail is delivered daily to a post box located in every classroom. Students enjoy writing, receiving and reading mail.

At Carminati, the principal, the custodian, and the students now have new jobs to support school wide communication. Each morning the school day starts with a news report from a roving location broadcast through closed-circuit television to all classes in the school. The principal and a student news team read announcements, introduce visitors, showcase displays on the walls, and even tell a joke or two, to get the whole school off to a good start. The custodian is the roving camera man, videotaping a changing cast of fledgling reporters.

Reaching out to audiences beyond the school can expand the purpose and meaning of literacy and heighten the excitement of writing and reading.

Two teachers, one elementary and one high school, decided to connect their classes through writing and reading. Kathleen Feeney, a multi-age teacher at Esperanza Elementary School, had all her young students (grades 1, 2,

and 3) write autobiographies. Details — age, hobbies, favorite books, brothers and sisters, and other information about the writer — filled the autobiographies. Carol Gibson, the high school teacher, had her students write *special* stories for the younger kids, based on their autobiographies. It was important that the stories be readable to the younger kids. Mrs. Gibson selected fifty books from the multi-age classroom to provide her students with examples of the vocabulary to use. The high schoolers presented their stories to the multi-agers in person. The results were outstanding.

A story written for Kurt, *Kurt's Day*, was about a boy who was small for his age and saved the day for his soccer team. The story was filled with specific details about Kurt: his interest in pets, bicycles, and motorcars, even his recent problem with a sore ankle. Likewise, Lauren's story, *The Forest of Dreams*, written and illustrated just for her, was about a girl lost in a forest of her dreams. The girl wandered through the forest seeking advice from the forest animals. An iguana's suggestion provided a solution to her confusion.

The Esperanza students were *ecstatic* when the older kids came to visit and offer their writing. The classroom was filled with reading. Little kids read to big kids. When the authors left, the multi-agers were not even eager to go to recess or to lunch. They wanted to continue reading *their* stories to their classmates. They had so thoroughly enjoyed sharing them with each other.

An older student helps Lauren read a story he wrote especially for her

Some had already started on thank-you notes. A few were planning stories of their own, for their high school "buddies." A group was even preparing to present a play, written by one of the high school students, the following Monday. The reading and writing had been for a real purpose.

Sharing the story is fun, too

Communicating Through Technology

Computers, modems and telecommunication software offer students the capability to communicate with other students a world away. At some literacy sites, students have participated in the ComputerPals Writing Network. Students shared stories of their own with an audience of peers around the state. *Nancy's Story* emerged. Students at each participating site wrote a chapter to continue a story about the cartoon character, Nancy. Late in the Spring of 1993, one hundred seventy-five authors, accompanied by their parents and teachers, met at the capitol to finish their story and to celebrate.

In a partnership with Motorola and Arizona State University, Carminati is using Internet technology to connect students to others throughout the country and the world. They share "book talks," to tell others about their favorite books. They also compose books with others by writing their section of a "round robin" composition. In another project, third graders interviewed the principal and submitted their resulting article to a shared data base. They are planning to select articles from this database to form a school newspaper, with the local assistance from staff of the Tempe *Tribune*. Their audience will include adults.

Communicating With the Community

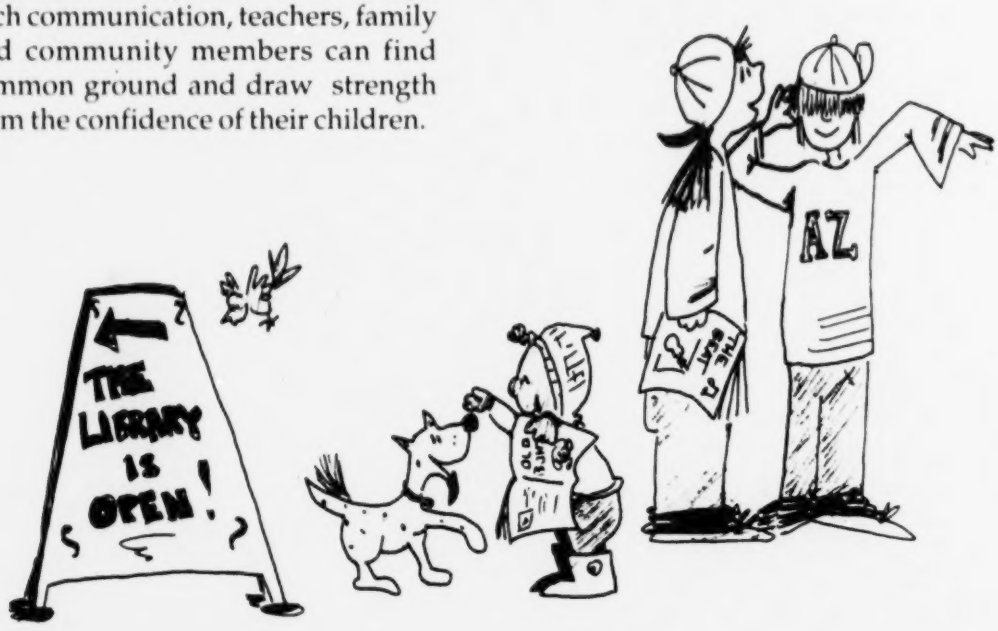
As mentioned, at many literacy sites, teachers encourage students to address the school community and neighborhood. Students send invitations, letters, stories, reports, and books home. Parents, grandparents, and family members are invited to meetings, ceremonies, and teas to see, watch and applaud, "their" students reading poetry, performing Readers' Theater pieces and presenting original plays.

Students have also contributed to their local communities through literate activities. Kindergarten students from

Abia Judd visited nursing homes to read their stories to the elderly. Anyone can telephone the Glendale public library and request a story reading from the collection of tapes made by the students at Bicentennial. Students from Abia Judd created posters using their writing for "National Hospital Week," which were displayed in nearby hospitals. Exhibits of student writing were also prominently shown in several Prescott business locations. Each month the exhibits are renewed.

Sharing helps everyone to learn

Communicate and *community* have a shared Latin root word, *communis*, meaning common. Through exhibits, performances, and recitations, communities can get to know, and appreciate, their kids. Adults have found pride and meaning in the spontaneity, the freedom of their children's literacy activities. Through such communication, teachers, family and community members can find common ground and draw strength from the confidence of their children.



PART IV: SUPPORTING LITERACY THROUGH SCHOOL CULTURE ☼

At a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, take delight in each other's company. ***My guess is that when schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends we now pursue so painfully and artificially will be achieved somewhat more naturally.***

Nel Noddings, *Education Week*, December 7, 1988

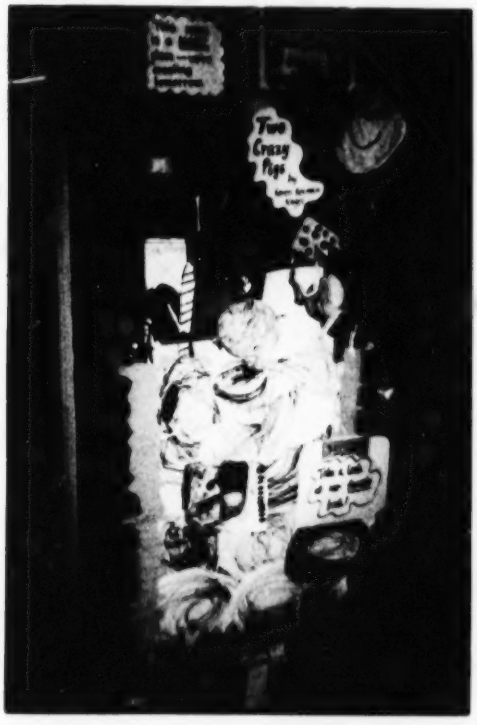
School culture pertains to the environments and contexts of learning. People refer to culture when they make comments such as, "That's the way things are done around here." Students use their familiarity with the school culture when they tell you, "We don't do that here." People at the school develop a common understanding of the what is normal and acceptable. When Bob Wortman, the principal at Borton Primary Magnet told us, "We don't have rules here. We have norms," he was referring to norms of behavior which define school culture, not just for kids, but for adults, too.

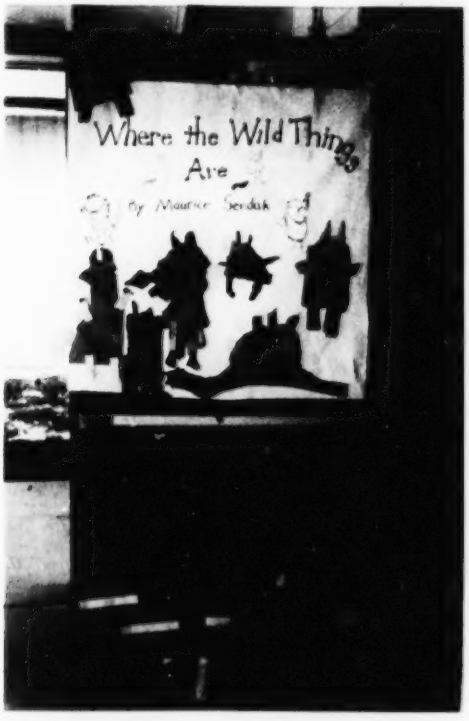
School cultures at the literacy sites promoted literacy. The evidence was in the physical spaces: what was displayed and how people arranged and used those spaces. School culture also includes how people act; their patterns of behavior, and the beliefs evident in the way they relate to each other. At the sites we visited, there was not only the constant exercise of literacy but a pervasive respect and caring for individuals. Teachers and principals emphasized their child-centered approach and their commitment to children. These were an essential underpinning to their literacy practices. School culture at literacy sites was not just using big books, making an author's chair, and having a nice library with many computers. It was also about what people valued as reflected in *how* things got done. The following section describes how the school culture and a shared vision for their students supported teachers and principals' literacy practices.

Seeing Literacy "Artifacts" in Schools and Classrooms

It is easy to see the "artifacts" of a school that show a focus on literacy. Mottoes about educating and caring for every child are prominently displayed. The displays are alternately made by adults and children. Commercial posters and children-made posters urge students to read particular books.

Bulletin boards with photographs, drawings, and student writing spotlight particular people or events. Banners advertise important school events, an upcoming Authors' Celebration, a Reading Contest, and





Classroom door decorations declare the importance of reading

parent or community meetings. Displays are full of children's work; they fill the walls. Even the doors proclaim and celebrate the magic of discovery through reading.

In Mrs. Deanna Pitts' classroom at Taylor Hicks in Prescott, there is a "Student of the Week" bulletin board display. She selects a student each week. Over the school year every child has a turn. The honored student brings his or her photograph to class and writes three things "that you may not know about me." They are prominently displayed on the bulletin board. All classmates write a letter to the "Student of the Week" listing three good qualities that they see about the student. These letters are collected into a book that the student can take home. Mrs. Pitts, like the other teachers we observed, arranges the classroom environment to stimulate purposeful writing, encourage classroom collegiality, and build esteem for her students.

Teachers arranged their classrooms so that the tools of literacy were accessible to their students. Books, paper, tape recorders, computers, pencils, and crayons were within easy reach for children to use. Classroom spaces were varied. They encouraged children to settle down, to read, write, or discuss. Students had work spaces where they could read independently or quietly, sharing the discovery of a good book.

Two students settle down in a cozy spot and share their books

Establishing a Community of Learners

Staff at literacy sites make special efforts to develop a sense of community at their schools. They set common goals. They develop shared beliefs about child-centered learning. They help one another create "safe" havens for learning where students and adults are not afraid to take risks, make mistakes, or try new ideas. In some schools, the teachers and principal observe daily routines to nurture a sense of community.

First thing in the morning, Bob Wortman at Borton Primary Magnet School, is stationed at the top of the steps which lead from the playground to the interior halls. As principal, it is his custom to greet his children as they come to school: "Welcome and happy Friday, Jorge! Buenos dias, Maria! Slow down," he says as he bends down to the height of the kindergartner running up the steps, "there is a whole day ahead of you!" Before classes begin, the children, faculty and staff gather in the courtyard. Bob calls it the "morning gathering."

The "morning gathering"

A class of children and their teachers lead the entire school in pledge, songs, and announcements. This small primary school, located in central-city Tucson, is a sanctuary for learning, for the children from the immediate attendance area as well as from various neighborhoods all over the city.

Building communities for learning went beyond issues of literacy. Sites were distinctly child-centered, striving to meet the needs of their students, and valuing them as human beings as well as learners. They were places where people were seen to genuinely care for each other.

Isaac Imes School in Glendale is organized around three teams (grades K-3, 4-6, and 7-8). In the primary team, more than half of the classes are multi-grade classes. Teachers in these classes prefer to work with multi-age children. They see the benefit of having more time to know the children, to develop a sense of "family," and to provide developmentally appropriate instruction. According to Roger Jackson, the principal, many parents request the multi-age classes. A deep sense of community is sometimes difficult to accomplish in a single year.

The philosophy binding the school community is generally one of child-centeredness. When faculty were asked about the uniqueness of Bicentennial School, surprisingly, they did not emphasize their literacy practices, *per se*. Instead, in this relatively large primary school of 670 students, they talked glowingly about their child centered orientation. They have a genuine sense of caring for children.

Classrooms are places where students listen to and help each other

Similarly, educators at the other literacy sites we visited, spoke of their shared philosophy of child-centeredness and caring. At Carminati, teachers described how it came into focus with their literacy program, as a springboard for further school development, partnership and restructuring. As Nancy Haugen, the principal at Carminati, put it: "The thing we do best is consider the interest of children."

Partnering With the Community

Parents, family members, and other community people were "drawn in," enlisted as "partners in education" into instruction, into classroom activities and school programs.

At Taylor Hicks and Abia Judd Elementary, parent volumteers regularly work with small groups of students and serve as side-by-side reading coaches. A two days of parent training for such instruction is required at Abia Judd. Janice Henry, the reading resource teacher, publishes a monthly "Side-by-Side" Newsletter, to network with contributing parents. She provides on-going support and suggestions to parent volunteers.

At Carminati, Mr. Merrill is the hub of the publishing center. He is the grandfather of a student at the school and volunteers daily to coordinate and assist in publishing books written by students. His daughter, the child's mother, does the typing. He assembles and binds both big and little books in several styles. He developed an order form to make this process more efficient and allow the teachers to specify the size and style of blank or finished books. The instructions read: *"Please use the space below for a description and diagram of the layout. Please be specific. If no instructions are given, the book will be creatively completed by the publisher."* His energy and creativity make possible the volume of publishing evident throughout the school.

Parents, family members, and people from the community have supported literacy activities at sites in a number of other ways. They organized annual book fairs and raised funds to purchase additional school equipment, such as literature books and computers. Kelton Aker, principal at Taylor Hicks, has arranged a yearly line-up of guest speakers who present workshops for the students. A local newspaper editor also came to talk to students about working in the newspaper business.

At Christensen, outside agencies and businesses work to support literacy efforts. Mr. Ake combines parent and community service volunteering and teaches keyboarding to students on a regular basis. His work at Christensen was written into his job description with the Forest Service. When the school initiated a book program, the local Pizza Hut was enlisted to support the school's literacy efforts by rewarding readers with pizza.

Parents, teachers, and community began to form a more cohesive whole, became more responsive to the needs of their students (children) and to the tasks at hand. Progressively a shared vision of a common goal emerged. All participants felt they had contributed, given and received, and were aware that these results could not have been achieved for their children without their common efforts.

Affirming Children's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

At literacy sites the richness of language and cultural diversity are recognized. Respect is given each child's background, culture and first language. Teachers are succeeding in capitalizing on that diversity to improve student literacy.

At Silvestre S. Herrera School in Phoenix, both Spanish and English are used. In many classrooms teachers speak and instruct in the two languages. Teachers may first speak in Spanish, if the students are speaking in Spanish. Spanish is typically followed with the equivalent in English. If students and teacher both speak in English, the teacher's English is followed by Spanish. Hallway conversations between adults and students, and among the students themselves, are often carried out in English and Spanish. The Spanish-speaking kindergarten teacher and the English-speaking kindergarten teacher trade classes every day so that the students could learn the language they do not know. As it is in other literacy sites, Herrera staff value the richness of language and cultural diversity.

Parents are encouraged to monitor their child's progress, and in so doing, to include their home activities as an active part of their child's literacy growth. Literacy site staff play a critical role in making parental involvement and participation a success. Tutoring at home reinforced and complemented work done in school. Some sites carried the process further, by involving parents in "family literacy" activities, in which student and parents shared literacy learning activities. All efforts were oriented to encourage and sustain improvements in student achievement.

At Borton, students can check out "Fine Arts Filled" backpacks. The art teacher helps the student select art work to be included: music tapes, art books (in English and Spanish), and small reproductions of sculptures from the school collection. Bus tickets and museum passes are included for both parent and student. Both report enjoying these activities. Almost every student at Borton has checked out an Art backpack at least once during the school year.

At Westwood School, Jo Van Loo encouraged story reading for her kindergartners at home without creating a burden on her already busy parents. She anticipated that some of her parents would have difficulty reading with their child, because many worked long hours at more than one job and their own reading skills might be limited. She used grant money to purchase books with matching audio-tapes and made them available for students to check out nights and over weekends. Her effort was a tremendous success. Students told her how much they liked the stories. They actively promoted what they had "read" to their classmates. The books were treated with great care. They never got lost and were promptly returned for others to enjoy. Parents

told her how much they liked the books. Several revealed that listening to the tapes and following along in the books was good practice for them, too.

Some parental "training" is often provided at literacy sites. At Christensen, the staff offers informative sessions for parents. The school holds a "Family Literacy Night" where parents learn to conduct paired readings, to appreciate the importance of play and learning games, for example, the M&M math exercise. Educational videos are available for screening. Guest speakers are also invited to the Family Literacy Night. All efforts are directed to familiarize parents with the school's work and how educational practice has progressed since they were in school themselves.

Herrera is particularly successful in reaching out to parents new to the United States, who are often non-native English speakers. Human and material resources are made available to them. *Even Start*, a family literacy program, provides day and evening classes in both English and Spanish. Topics stress parental involvement in support of literacy. "How to Read with Your Child" and "How to Work with Your Child in Math" are typical presentations. Parents can make use of the school library and computer facilities for themselves and for any class projects. They can even take high school courses, leading to a GED. Herrera teachers also offer English instruction for preschool children. Parents attend those classes and become familiar with the school system and the teachers. Teacher

Mothers attend a presentation

often become advocates or mentors of both student and parent.

The overarching focus of the panoply of programs at the literacy sites was a multifaceted, comprehensive approach to literacy, carried beyond the classroom, into family, community and cultural environments from which the student comes. The material and human resources provided by the adults working together, considering the interests of their children, has spelled success for early literacy learning.

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APPENDIX: LITERACY SITES VISITED

Abia Judd Elementary School
1749 Williamson Valley Road
Prescott, AZ 86301
Principal: Marianne Kapp
(602) 445-5400

Bicentennial South
Elementary School
7240 W. Colter Street
Glendale, AZ 85303
Principal: Roxanne Kearns
(602) 842-8295

Borton Primary
Magnet School
700 E. 22nd Street
Tucson, AZ 85713
Principal: Dr. Robert Wortman
(602) 798-2723

Carminati Elementary School
4001 S. McAllister Avenue
Tempe, AZ 85282
Principal: Nancy Haugen
(602) 784-1215

Esperanza Elementary School
251 W. Mohawk Lane
Phoenix, AZ 85027
Principal: Dr. Larry Bauer
(602) 581-7979

Isaac E. Imes Magnet
Elementary School
6625 N. 56th Avenue
Glendale, AZ 85301
Principal: Roger Jackson
(602) 842-8220

Neil V. Christensen
Elementary School
4000 N. Cummings Street
Flagstaff, AZ 86004
Principal: Dr. Pat Horn
(602) 773-4140

Silvestre S. Herrera
Elementary School
1350 S. 11th Street
Phoenix, AZ 85034
Principal: Dr. Ruth Ann Marston
(602) 257-3885

Taylor Hicks
Elementary School
1845 Campbell Avenue
Prescott, AZ 86301
Principal: Kelton Aker
(602) 445-5400

Westwood Primary School
2225 W. Pierson Street
Phoenix, AZ 85015
Principal: Dr. Martha Braly
(602) 246-5030

FarWest LABORATORY 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107 Tel: (415)565-3000